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INQUIRY

Topic: INSIDE THE CIA

William Casey, 70, is director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He began his intelligence career in World War II, and then served in a variety of public and private jobs, including a State Department post and as a partner in a New York City law firm. He was interviewed about the activities of the CIA for USA TODAY by free-lance writer Morgan Strong.



William Casey

Public has positive attitude about CIA

USA TODAY: What are the CIA's chief functions?

CASEY: The agency's chief function is to produce intelligence on matters of national interest that are important to the policymaking and decision-making process. We collect information through various means, including such technical means as photography, then evaluate, analyze and synthesize this information to reach judgments.

USA TODAY: Is the CIA the coordinator of all the government's intelligence activities?

CASEY: As director, I'm charged with coordinating the activities of the intelligence community, which is made up of a group of organizations including the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, Army, Navy, Air Force, the FBI, the Departments of Energy, Treasury, and State. The CIA is the primary assembler of all

sources of intelligence. The CIA also has a collection role, acquiring information openly and clandestinely; other agencies also collect information.

USA TODAY: Isn't there some competition among the agencies, though?

CASEY: There's deliberate competition. We believe in

competitive analysis, in the sense that we encourage the components of the community to come up with their own judgments. Then we meet in the National Foreign Intelligence Board to sort it out and reconcile differences. What we can't reconcile, we flag for the attention of the policymakers. In that sense, we encourage competition.

USA TODAY: Is there any tension among the intelligence agencies?

CASEY: Very little. Today, I'm going to meet with the heads of the agencies. We'll spend a full day sorting out problems. We meet each week to approve National Intelligence Estimates. We look for differences and if they are significant, we make clear that they exist. The only turf I have to protect is our objectivity.

USA TODAY: There were differing estimates of the strength of the defenders during the Grenada invasion. Do policymakers sometimes ignore or misinterpret information provided by the CIA?

CASEY: I don't think the Grenada example is a good one. Although there were no CIA officials on the spot, we had a number of sources on the island providing information

regularly. There was never a difference in the intelligence community (regarding Cuban strength) of more than 200. Intelligence is not an exact science, and there will be differences. That's why we try to bring out the significant areas of disagreement and determine the rationale and reasons for them. There is a danger if intelligence is ignored, but we've done a lot to minimize that.

USA TODAY: How?

CASEY: We brief principal officials in government every day. We've increased the number of National Intelligence Estimates to about 50 a year, up from about 12 a year in the late 1970s. These estimates are on the table when decisions are made. Sometimes this intelligence isn't given sufficient weight by policymakers, but there is a good give and take that provides assurance that it will be looked at and understood. The best assurance... rests in a good relationship between the intelligence people and the policy people. Now this relationship is very close.

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